

New Alden principal eager for children's arrival

By TOM BENSON
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DUXBURY — Last week, the halls of Alden Elementary School were quiet, the perfect atmosphere for an administrator reading reports and finishing class assignments.

By the end of this week, the tranquility will be broken by more than 400 sets of footsteps and high-pitched voices. Sue Skeiber couldn't be happier.

In the two months since she took the helm of the town's school for third- and fourth-graders, Skeiber has spent time spent honing strategies, hiring teachers and getting supplies. On Thursday, she will "morph" from manager to educator.

"Right now, your whole emphasis is: Are we ready? Then, once the year starts, it's really more into the teaching and learning part of it," Skeiber said. "I'm looking forward to the kids coming back. I'm ready to hear some kids' voices in the hall."

Thursday is the first day of classes at the high school, the middle school and the Alden School. The Chandler Elementary School will open for the

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year Friday, and kindergartners' first day of school is Sept. 7.

At least half of the Alden students will be new to the school — most coming from Chandler — so Skeiber will be far from the only new face in the Alden halls. And she doesn't plan to be an unfamiliar face for long.

Skeiber, a former teacher with two decades of experience, looks forward to spending time in the classroom and working with teachers and students.

"I want to be in classrooms for two reasons," she said in an interview last week. "I want kids to know who I am and know they can talk to me. And I want teachers to know the same thing."

Skeiber's office is just to the right of the school's front door, a location that is compatible with her desire to be accessible to students, teachers and parents.

"My whole philosophy is to create a school that is welcoming and educationally challenging for all students," she said. "I don't want to lose

anybody. To do that, I need to be able to work with the staff and work with the families. I need to be accessible to people."

Skeiber's is new to the Alden School, but she spent four years as assistant principal at the school next door, currently the town's middle school.

The Weymouth native joined the Duxbury school system as assistant principal at what was then the elementary school. When the town reorganized its grade system and the elementary school became the middle school, Skeiber stayed on there. This summer, she replaced retiring Principal Charles Elliot at Alden.

During her years in Duxbury and the ones when she was a teacher in the East Bridgewater public schools, Skeiber has worked with children from grades 2 to 8. She recognizes that a school for grades 3 and 4 is unusual, but she said those years can be seen as transitional.

"I see the school as a wonderful bridge between a more primary experience and then heading next door to the middle school," Skeiber said.

"This is kind of an exciting two years to help nurture those kiddos from the primary to the middle school.

"The primary years, they're really learning the nuts and bolts. By third and fourth grades, they're starting to apply it more. They're making connections between reading and science and math. They start to have a better sense of what learning is all about. They start to see why in math (they're) learning this and how it might relate to science."

She plans to make testing a more regular part of the curriculum.

"We are working in our instruction to find ways of instructing children that will meet their learning styles," she said. "... That ought to be a daily process, not just when we have a test."

The hope is that by tailoring instruction methods to the students and acclimating them to testing, the fourth-graders at the school will have an easier time with the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System tests in the spring.

Skeiber lives in Kingston and has been married for 28 years. She has a grown son and daughter.



BERT LANE photo

Sue Skeiber is the new principal of the Alden Elementary School.